

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 192302Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3311
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 36947

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR
SUBJECT: GISCARD'S SPEECH IN NORMANDY

SUMMARY. IN HIS FIRST MAJOR SPEECH SINCE CARPENTRAS
LAST JULY, GISCARD ADDRESSED A RURAL AUDIENCE OF
50,000 ON DECEMBER 16 AT VASSY IN THE CALVADOS DEPART-
MENT OF LOWER NORMANDY, THE DEPARTMENT WHICH PRESIDENT
CARTER WILL VISIT JANUARY 5. DEVOTED MAINLY TO FRENCH
AGRICULTURE, THE PROGRESS IT HAS MADE IN THE LAST 20
YEARS AND THE ESSENTIAL ROLE IT WILL HAVE IN THE FUTURE,
THE SPEECH ENDED WITH A POLITICAL ALLEGORY WHICH LEFT
NO ONE IN DOUBT REGARDING THE IDENTITY OF ITS PRINCIPAL
ACTORS. MAKING WHAT COULD BE CONSIDERED A HALF-HEARTED
GESTURE TO THE SOCIALISTS, APPEALING FOR UNITY IN THE
GOVERNING MAJORITY, GISCARD TOOK A HALF-STEP TOWARD
ENGAGING HIMSELF MORE IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BUT
ESSENTIALLY CAMPED ON HIS FAVORITE POSITION ABOVE THE
PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

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1. GISCARD'S SPEECH CAME LESS THAN TWO WEEKS AFTER RPR
PRESIDENT CHIRAC SPRUNG HIS OVERLY DRAMATIC CALL TO
MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT (PARIS 35335). THEIR MEETING,
THE CONTENTS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN KEPT SCRUPULOUSLY SE-
CRET, HAS BEEN FOLLOWED BY A TEMPORARY IMPROVEMENT IN
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MEN AND AMONG THE PARTIES
IN THE MAJORITY. TO BE SURE, CHIRAC HAS SUBSEQUENTLY

INSISTED AS MUCH ON THE INDIVIDUALITY OF EACH PARTY AS ON ANY POSSIBLE AGREEMENT WITHIN THE MAJORITY ON A PLATFORM OF GENERAL PRINCIPLES; IN ADDITION, THE REPUBLICAN AND CENTRIST PARTIES, WHICH HAVE RECENTLY DROPPED IN VOTER INTENTION POLLS, CERTAINLY INTEND TO USE THE REMAINING THREE MONTHS IN THE CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE THEIR SCORE -- TO THE RPR'S DETRIMENT, IF NECESSARY. BUT, ON THE WHOLE, THE MAJORITY APPEARS SLIGHTLY BETTER ORGANIZED TO THE PUBLIC THAN SOME MONTHS AGO, AND GISCARD SEEMS TO WANT TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS FACT AND ENCOURAGE ITS CONTINUATION. "FROM NOW ON, YOU ARE GOING TO CONSTRUCT TOGETHER, STOP BICKERING, AND PRESENT ME WITH A BOLD PROJECT, BECAUSE IT IS A MATTER NOT ONLY OF CONSERVING MY HOUSE BUT RENOVATING IT IN ORDER TO FIND HAPPINESS THERE", GISCARD CONCLUDED. PARENTHETICALLY, AND THIS MUST ALSO BE IN THE MIND OF EVERY MAJORITY LEADER, THE MAJORITY HAS EVERY REASON NOT TO LET ITS GUARD DOWN, GIVEN THE CONSTANCY OF THE LEFT'S SCORE AT ABOUT 51 PERCENT OF VOTER INTENTIONS.

2. ADDRESSING THE LEFT, GISCARD CONTINUED, "MY DESIRE IS TO PROVIDE WORK FOR EVERYBODY, FOR OUR COUNTRY NEEDS TO BE UNITED AND EACH PERSON SHOULD FIND WORK THERE. LET THOSE WHO WANT TO WORK FOR ME DO SO, ON CONDITION OF COURSE THAT THEY AGREE TO THE PLANS WHICH I HAVE RETAINED." GISCARD IS ONLY SAYING PUBLICLY HERE WHAT HE

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AND HIS ADVISORS HAVE BEEN HOPING PRIVATELY SINCE HE WON THE PRESIDENCY IN 1974, NAMELY THAT MODERATE SOCIA-

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LISTS AND LEFT RADICALS LEAVE THE COMMON PROGRAM OF THE LEFT AND JOIN WITH HIM TO FORM A BROAD CENTRIST GOVERNMENT. BUT HIS APPEAL HAS AS LITTLE CHANCE OF BEING HEARD TODAY AS BEFORE BY HIS INTENDED AUDIENCE, AND INDEED THEY ALL JOINED IMMEDIATELY IN CRITICIZING THE SPEECH. THE PRESIDENT OF COURSE DOES NOT EXPECT ANY DEFECTIONS SOON IN THE OPPOSITION, BUT HE IS, IN HIS SEMI-DETACHED STYLE, THINKING OF FRANCE IN THE POST-MARCH PERIOD, WHEN MANY MORE GOVERNING COMBINATIONS MAY BE POSSIBLE THAN TODAY.

3. THE SPEECH WAS MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE CONSISTENCY IT SHOWS IN THE GISCARD STYLE AND CONTENT. IT WAS ANOTHER OF HIS RELATIVELY RARE DIRECT PRONOUNCEMENTS, EVEN BY MEANS OF AN ALLEGORY, ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. THOUGH ENCOURAGED BY CHIRAC AND OTHERS IN THE MAJORITY TO ENGAGE HIMSELF MORE, HE IS CONTENT TO KEEP HIS DISTANCE FROM PURE ELECTIONEERING WHILE PROMI-
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SING TO "INDICATE THE RIGHT CHOICE AT THE RIGHT TIME" (PRESUMABLY IN LATE JANUARY). IN THIS WAY HE HOPES TO CONTRIBUTE IN THE SHORT TERM TO REDUCING THE LEVEL OF POLEMICS BETWEEN THE LEFT AND RIGHT AND IN THE LONGER TERM (AFTER MARCH?) END UP WITH A GOVERNMENT WHICH REPRESENTS MORE THAN 50.1 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE. THE QUESTION REMAINS AS TO WHAT WILL BE THE PROGRAM OF SUCH A GOVERNMENT. WHILE GISCARD CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT LEAVING THE LEFT'S COMMON PROGRAM WAS A CONDITION TO WORKING WITH AT LEAST PARTS OF THE LEFT, HIS ONLY AFFIRMATIVE IDEA WAS A CALL FOR A BOLD PROJECT. AND SUCH A PROJECT, IF PUSHED TOO FAR BY PRIME MINISTER BARRE WHEN HE PRESENTS HIS "ACTION OBJECTIVES" ON JANUARY 7, RUN THE RISK OF DRAWING FIRE FROM CHIRAC. GISCARD'S SPEECH AT VASSY, WITH ITS THINLY VEILED APPEAL TO BOTH SIDES BUT ABOVE ALL FOR UNITY TO THE ORDINARY FRENCHMAN, SYMBOLIZES THE PREDICAMENT OF THE PRESENT RIGIDITY OF

THE TWO POLITICAL BLOCS, THE AMBIGUITY OF THE POST-MARCH
PERIOD AND THE LIMITED ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT TO MOVE
BEYOND THESE TWO CONSTRAINTS.
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